GOVERNMENT OF INDIA
EXTERNAL AFFAIRS
LOK SABHA

UNSTARRED QUESTION NO:3200
ANSWERED ON:12.03.2003
FATE OF FIJI INDIANS
IQBAL AHMED SARADGI

Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) the total number of Indians presently living in Fiji;

(b) the details of the problems faced by them;

(c) whether the Government have taken up this issue with Fiji Government, including the assistance proposed to be extended to them;

(d) if so, the details thereof;

(e) whether the Fiji Indians in this regard have also petitioned the UN Committee on Elimination of all forms of Racial Discrimination; and

(f) if so, the details thereof?

Answer

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (Shri Vinod Khanna)

(a) - (f) A Statement is placed on the Table of the House.

STATEMENT REFERED TO IN THE ANSWER TO THE LOK SABHA UNSTARRED QUESTION NO. 3200 TO BE ANSWER 12.03.2003 0N `FATE OF FIJI INDIANS`

In Fiji, according to the 1996 census, 337,000 (43.6%) out of a total population of 773,000 are of Indian origin. They face political, economic and social problems.

(i) In the 2001 elections, the Fiji Labour Party led by Mr. Mahendra Chaudhry emerged as the second largest party.It was not included in the Government though the Constitution has provisions under Article 99 (5) that Prime Minister should offer Cabinet positions to all parties which have 10% or more representation in the House on a proportionate basis. The Fiji Labour Party took the matter to the High Court which ruled in April 2002 in their favour. The Fijian Government, however, filed an appeal in the Supreme Court and the hearing is scheduled in June 2003.

(ii) The non-renewal of land leases to farmers of Indian origin has led to their evacuation from the land and resulting migration.

(iii) Socially, they generally feel discriminated by the Fijian establishment which is illustrated by lack of adequate representation in the higher echelons of bureaucracy, police and the armed forces. The Social Justice Act enacted by the present Government has introduced affirmative action programme based on race, which has been resented by the Indo-Fijian community.

2. The Government of India remains in touch with the Government of Fiji as well as the leaders of the people of Indian origin on the political situation and welfare of the people of Indian origin with a view to ensuring equitable political, economic and social rights for all its citizens. In addition, the Government is working with the Commonwealth Ministerial Action Group (CMAG), of which India is a member, to keep Fiji active on its agenda until the resolution of the Constitutional case on power sharing.

3. It is understood that the National Farmers Union, led by Mr. Mahendra Chaudhry, has made submission to the UN Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD) on `Discriminatory Policies and Practices in Fiji`. Citizens Constitutional Forum, an NGO, has also made a similar submission on Fiji to the CERD. The Fiji case is scheduled to be examined by the Committee in Geneva on 11-12 March, 2003.